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ABSTRACT

A reading program evaluation was conducted by the school district of Eugene, Oregon, during the 1976-1977 school year. Three major questions were to be answered: (1) Are the district's elementary reading programs effective according to the district's reading scope and sequence? (2) What makes effective programs effective? (3) If programs are not effective, what can be done to make them effective? The committee agreed to concentrate on comprehension and vocabulary. The study was conducted through questionnaires, interviews, the study of standardized test scores, and classroom observation. The data were prepared as 32 individual reading reports, one for each school, each addressing reading instruction, factual and demographic data, and the strengths and weaknesses of each school's program. The reports were sent to the schools, and responses were invited. Major deletions or misinterpretations were corrected, and staff disagreements with the report were included as one-page additions to the reports without comment. (A sample report is included.) (TJ)

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Thirty-two Varieties of Reading

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Thirty-two Varieties of Reading

The purpose of this paper is to present the results of a reading evaluation conducted in the elementary schools of Eugene, Oregon, during the 1976-77 school year. Emphasis will be given to the logistics of conducting the study, the political implications and the actual outcomes of the data.

Rarely does a study emerge full bloom. This study was no exception. On October 6, 1975, the school board of Eugene, Oregon, requested that a comprehensive plan for assessing reading instruction be developed. The first phase of this work required principals to prepare descriptions of their schools' reading plans. These descriptions were collected, summarized, and reported in March 1976 to the board. After discussion of the report in April of 1976, the superintendent's staff recommended that reading instruction be further evaluated. With this preliminary assessment as a starting point decisions were made that the evaluation would focus on elementary schools only. The next step was the development of a preliminary evaluation plan which was presented to the board of directors in May of 1976. This was followed in June with a work session between the Research, Development and Evaluation (RD&E) and the board of directors to inform the board as to the evaluation techniques, problems in the general area of evaluating the reading program, and extent of the evaluation. In August the board officially appointed a reading evaluation committee with a general charge "...that a comprehensive study and evaluation of the district's reading program be undertaken." In September of 1976 the seven-member committee met for the first time. The seven-member committee was appointed by the superintendent through the authority of the board.

A year later, this method of appointment became a crucial issue. Since the committee was viewed as an arm of the school board, a legal implication arose regarding the state's open meeting laws and the rights of the press to be present at committee meetings. Legal opinion indicated that the committee could be construed as an extension of the board because it directed that an evaluation be done. Within this definition, the meetings of the committee could be viewed as public meetings open to press. As a result, one member of the news media elected to attend several of the committee meetings. This had interesting implications that will be further dealt with in this report.

The committee was composed of an elementary principal, a member of the University of Oregon faculty, the district's director of educational services, an elementary reading specialist, an elementary classroom teacher, a member of the school board and a lay member from the community, who was active with the local adult literacy league. The district's evaluation specialist was an ex officio member of the committee. The role of the reading evaluation committee was to determine what would be evaluated, leaving how it would be done as the responsibility of the RD&E staff.

During the spring of 1976, the five largest school districts and state departments of education in 11 western states were telephoned and asked if they knew of any school district which had carried out an evaluation of its reading instruction program. Other than Title I evaluations, this survey resulted in locating only one school district which had carried out an evaluation similar to the one planned for this district. A review of the literature published since 1960 was made to find articles or books reporting on actual reading evaluations carried out by school districts. A search of the 1960-68 Educational Index listed 82 references relevant to the evaluation of reading instruction. An ERIC search of published literature since 1968 listed 49

references to reading programs. All published references were read. No articles or books describing actual evaluations were located through these procedures.

At the first meeting of the evaluation committee, the RD&E staff told the group that they had been unable to locate any standards as to what specified a good reading evaluation. It was further stated that the evaluation group was unable to obtain agreement from its source documents as to which behaviors constituted the teaching of reading. A list of approximately 100 topics that could be included in the evaluation were presented to the committee. By January 1, 1977, the committee had reviewed the topics, ranked them as to priority, made cost estimates for each topic, and had decided to study 26 questions. On October 19, 1976, the reading evaluation committee stated three major questions to be answered by the evaluation. These were: 1) Are the district's elementary reading programs effective according to the district's reading scope and sequence; 2) what makes effective programs effective; and 3) if programs are not effective, what are those things that could be done to make them effective. The study of the 26 questions identified by the committee would take place within this threefold context. Since agreement could not be reached as to what constitutes the teaching of reading, the committee agreed to evaluate the following kinds of reading activity; comprehension, vocabulary, oral reading, word analysis, study skills and silent reading. It was not possible to systematically evaluate all of these activities and in May of 1977 the committee decided to concentrate on the first two; comprehension and vocabulary, as measured by standardized, norm-referenced measures. The actual data collection plan was to involve existing test files in the district as well as questionnaire and interview data from a wide variety of individuals. Questionnaires were sent to all 402 people who taught

a regularly scheduled reading program in grades one through six, to all elementary principals, all elementary librarians, and all special education teachers. These groups comprise 94% of the district's elementary staff who are concerned with reading. All 26 reading specialists and 193 randomly-selected classroom teachers were interviewed. These groups comprised 47% of the certified elementary staff concerned with reading. In addition, 66 randomly-selected teachers and their 1,100 students were observed at four different times.

As can be seen at this point, the problem became one of too much data as opposed to too little data.

Types of Data Collected

This section briefly describes the major types of data collected and the general usefulness of each type. An attempt was made to isolate the costs of reading instruction through analysis of existing fiscal data regarding expenditures at district building level that pertained to reading instruction. Several analyses were made of data from the district budget office, the principals' own estimates of expenditures, and the regional directors' offices. The major result was that the accounting systems currently used by the district are not adequate to allow for this fine a determination to be made regarding reading or any other academic programs. It was found that this portion of the study took a disproportionate amount of resources as compared to the actual usable data produced by the effort. Each reading specialist at the elementary levels (N=26) was interviewed. These interviews were an attempt to determine the characteristics of reading specialists, the work they performed, their perceptions of the strengths, weaknesses and overall effectiveness of reading instruction in their assigned school, how children are

selected to receive help from reading specialists, and the specialists' recommendation for improvement of reading instruction in the district. A problem encountered was that it was not clear who were reading specialists. The phrase "reading specialist" was used to describe those people who work in schools and provide special help in reading. When this problem was resolved, it was found that 26 people serve the elementary schools as reading specialists. These data were quite useful in developing the final reports on each of the schools' programs.

Another group interviewed were the media specialists. They were surveyed regarding the interfacing of their role with the reading instruction of each school. Data were obtained from all schools with a media specialist assigned to them. The data were somewhat useful in the final write-ups about each school.

All elementary teachers directly involved in the reading program received a 14-page questionnaire which focused on teacher evaluation of reading materials as well as identifying materials used, availability of resources, etc. The results of this questionnaire were very useful.

A random sample of six elementary teachers involved with reading from each of the elementary schools in the district were selected for individual interviewing. The purpose of these interviews was to obtain highly specific information regarding the reading instruction program. The interviews (approximately 20-60 minutes each) focused on reading instruction for different groups of children and their recommendations for improving reading instruction in their school and in the district. The data from these interviews were extremely useful in developing the final report.

Classroom observation data were obtained on randomly-selected classrooms to determine how much time of the reading time block was actually spent

teaching and studying reading. A 25% random sample of all second, fourth, and sixth grade classrooms were selected for observation. Selected from 34 schools were 72 classroom teachers and their 1,100 students. Regularly scheduled reading periods for teachers and classrooms selected were observed by trained observers four times during the spring of 1977. This portion of the study was handled under a contract with an outside agency. A coding system was developed between the contractor and the RD&E unit regarding the types of behavior that would be observed. The time frame was such that these data were not available to meet the timeline of the primary report. Subsequent study of these variables has been of interest and further consideration must be given these data before their implications for instructions are fully utilized.

Standardized test data were used as an objective measure of reading, comprehension and vocabulary. Initial intent had been not to use standardized test data except as an auxiliary checkpoint. However, these test data were commonly available across all of the groups of students in our elementary program. These data became extremely useful in the school-by-school analysis.

Demographic Data

Limited demographic data from the 1970 census were available for each school attendance area. While these data were acknowledged to be seven years old, they did provide a common basis across all schools as indicants of mean income and educational level of the total population in each school's attendance area. These data were quite useful in helping to interpret the total reading report for each building.

Development of the Report

As the reader can now tell, mountains of data were on hand. The question

was what to do with all of it. The next step was to systematically arrange the data into ways that answered the committee's 26 questions. Going back to the title of this paper, "Thirty-two Varieties of Reading," one comes to the focal point of how to report the information. It would have been an easier task if one report could have been written for the district's reading program, but there was no district reading program. This was known in advance and in part determined the evaluation design. While there is a set of district reading objectives of K-12, each school was free to implement the objectives in different ways. As a result, it was necessary to prepare individual school reports; hence the development of a multitude of reports, one for each of the 32 varieties of reading programs.

Step one was to prepare individual reading reports. These were limited in nature, being not over three pages in the final report. The report was to address a brief description of the school's reading instruction, consideration of factual and demographic data, and consideration of the strengths and weaknesses of each school's program. An example of one school's report is in the appendix of this paper. The variety of data sources that were described in the preceding section were used in writing the description for each school.

Following General Accounting Office procedures, the evaluation design had a feedback loop at this point. After each school's report was prepared, RD&E staff sent copies of the report to each staff member and scheduled an appointment to discuss the report with the staff. The ground rules for the feedback loop were that any obvious errors in the data would be corrected immediately, any major deletions or misinterpretations of the data would be corrected upon receipt of documentation from the staff, and, if the staff disagreed with any of the interpretations, they were invited to prepare a one-page statement of their position. The RD&E unit would not edit or comment on the teacher reaction to the report, but would include it as part of the

document. The feedback sessions were conducted in all of the elementary schools and lasted between 15-240 minutes. Those in RD&E who conducted these feedback sessions agreed they were quite valuable--clarifications were made and, in some cases, reports were modified on the basis of it; in rare occasions total resistance was found to any of the data presented.

Step two was the incorporation of the building reports plus additional data into a 280-page document entitled "The First R: A Report on the Effectiveness of Reading Instruction in the Eugene Public Schools, Volume One, December 1977." This was followed by a 70-page Volume Two in March of 1978.

A final step built into the evaluation was to employ two independent outside evaluators to spend two days going through our evaluation and state what were the major weaknesses within it prior to submitting the report to the school board. The outside evaluators did an admirable job. When the report went to the board of directors the questions raised by these evaluators were presented to the board. This was a reassuring and objective check.

Conclusions

Based upon the analyis of these extensive data, several major conclusions were drawn. The summary of this report contained the conclusions given below.

"Analysis of scores on nationally used reading tests indicated there has been dramatic improvement of reading performance at most schools in the district over the past two years, and comparison of scores from 1976-77 with test scores recorded by the same students two years before showed that 18 of 28 schools had improved. Only nine had declined and one remained the same.

On the average, students in the second grade classes scored in the top one-third of the nation-wide student population that took these reading tests, and fourth and sixth grade students are just above the national average.

Results of standardized tests and teacher judgment of the situation in the schools agree that 15-20% of the children enrolled in Eugene's schools are experiencing reading difficulties.

Five schools have more than 25% of the sixth grade students scoring in the bottom one-third of the publisher's norming group.

As a result of the analysis of school descriptions, some strengths and weaknesses of the reading programs were common to several schools. Commonly observed strengths included 1) development of a staff agreement to teach similar materials; 2) willingness of staff to work on improvement of reading skills; 3) help from persons specially trained in reading instruction; 4) consistency in continuity between levels of the reading program; and 5) use of the district's list of reading skills to make sure students learn the skills they are supposed to learn. Common weaknesses included 1) lack of staff commitment to carrying out an agreement about the use of similar materials; 2) no organized school program for reading instruction because of ineffective administrative leadership; 3) lack of materials; 4) not enough time spent on reading; 5) not enough help from those specially trained in reading instruction; 6) a high and disruptive rate of students leaving and entering the program throughout the year; and 7) not integrating library resources into the school's instruction."

Overall, the major findings of this study would hardly surprise anyone associated with public schools. The important aspect is that details were available, for the first time, on the reading program in each building. As a result, some major program changes are being made in specific buildings. The results and the mandate to do something about them has caused the elementary schools to take a close look at their reading instruction program. For example, some schools' staffs are now considering that the program

in grades two and three does have a direct relationship to the reading program in grades four and five. A limited number of schools are having to come to grips with the fact that regardless of what they're doing, it evidently isn't the correct program for the students enrolled. While most of the schools came out looking very good, there were a small number that were identified publicly as having major problems. The summary of the report obviously would not make many people very comfortable, but one could question if the results of an evaluation should make everyone comfortable.

Reactions

At this point, let us address the question of public and staff reaction to reading evaluation. Approximately a year before the report was publicized I wrote a prediction of what the public reaction would be to this evaluation. My comments (that I'd had pinned to my bulletin board for a year) stated, in essence, that there might be a total of one dozen phone calls about reading programs from parents to any one school, there would be up to a maximum of three letters about our reading program in the local newspaper, and teachers or some staff groups might object to the report and/or attempt to discredit the report. My prediction was almost true. I don't know how many telephone calls schools received, but I haven't heard there were very many. Independent observers of the letters to the editor column found zero letters pertaining to our reading program. Some teachers and principals were very perturbed by the findings of the evaluation. The local education association did request that the state and national education association examine the report with the result that a research specialist from the National Education Association's Washington office was brought to Eugene to review the report.

Earlier in this paper reference was made to the open meeting law of the state of Oregon. A representative of the Eugene Register-Guard, in attending

the meetings under the legal requirements of the state of Oregon, had access to preliminary reports and discussion. During some of the discussions the reporter wrote articles about the proceedings, which were duly published. The headline of the first article was "Schools Fail at Reading" and had the net effect of causing the committee to stop talking. When the committee saw what they thought were private deliberations being reported in the newspaper, they became extremely cautious and said very little. The second part was that, prior to our outside evaluators reviewing our report and prior to the report going to our board of directors, the press released the report through the pages of a local newspaper. The net result was that, although the public became informed, it was, in part, misinformed. Shortly after the initial news coverage, the press printed a retraction regarding a limited amount of the data.

In summary, this paper has presented procedures used for an evaluation of reading instruction, types of data collected, the analysis, and mentioned problems resulting from the open meeting law in Oregon.

APPENDIX

I. Brief Description of the School's Reading Instruction

Based on data collected in spring of 1977, apparently did not have a current plan specifying how reading would be taught. A plan developed during the fall of 1974 existed, but it had not been recently updated. The two sets of materials most commonly used in the building were Ginn 360 and a Houghton Mifflin series. The record-keeping system was in operation and teachers indicated that they received from and passed on to appropriate levels student records. There was no reading specialist other than the specialist assigned to the Title I program. There had been no major change in materials used within the school during the last year. A Title I program existed within the building for 1976-77 and teachers indicated that students were working up to teacher expectations. Mixed reactions were expressed as to the accuracy of reading test scores as to measuring how students were able to read.

II. Discussion of Table

, an average sized school, appeared to parallel the district average values for most of the variables presented in the table. An area where it did not parallel was in terms of reading achievement scores. The second grade scores were below the district mean, while the fourth and sixth grade scores were above the district mean. This was an inverse pattern to what was typically encountered at those grade levels. Comparing

TABLE II-13

School: _____

Characteristic	School Data Grades 1-6	District Average
Student enrollment data for 1976-77	296	271
Number of certified staff 1976-77	17.67	17.49
Number of books reported in 1976-77 inventory	3,964	4,312
Number of media specialists working at the school expressed as % of a full-time position	.5	.52
Number of reading specialists working at the school expressed as % of a full-time position	1.0	
2nd grade 1976-77 reading scores (expressed in percentiles)	66	69
4th grade 1976-77 reading scores (expressed in percentiles)	67	57
6th grade 1976-77 reading scores (expressed in percentiles)	65	60
6th grade 1976-77 reading scores for students who stayed in the same school since the 4th grade (expressed in percentiles	75	63
% of school's 1974-75 4th grade students scoring in the bottom one-third of the student population taking the test nationally	20.45	29.99
% of school's 1976-77 6th grade students scoring in the bottom one-third of the student population taking the test nationally	--	15.27
Score on Organizational Continuity Index for 1976-77	49	55.06
Student withdrawal rate for 1976-77	17.36	17.50
% of people 25 years or older with 4 or more years of college in school's attendance area in 1970	11.21	24.48
Mean income of school's attendance area in 1970	$11,213.00	$11,930.00
Average number of minutes per day in teacher's scheduled reading period 1976-77	58	50.08
Average number of minutes per day of reading instruction outside teacher's scheduled period 1976-77	33	51.69
Average number of years each teacher has taught as of January 1, 1977	14.29	12.25
Average number of years each teacher has taught the grade they are now teaching as of January 1, 1977	8.46	6.98
Classload of average classroom teacher 1976-77	22.38	23.93

the last two years of test data showed that at all three grade levels tested, the group average scores for had shown a marked increase of from 13 to 18 percentage points for 1977.

Several teachers commented that there were too many students in the classrooms at However, for 1976-77 the data showed fewer students per teacher than the district average. In addition, a Title I program existed in the building, which also added staff above and beyond that required for implementation of the normal program.

III. Strengths and Weaknesses

A lack of unanimity or even simple majority existed in the data concerning strengths and weaknesses of the reading program. Within this limit, two strengths reported were continuity of program and the experience and quality of the staff.

It appeared that the teachers at thought they had a continuous program from grades one through six. Within the structure of the school there appeared to be a more cohesive program at the primary level than at upper elementary. Overall, there was conflicting evidence regarding communication between teachers within the building, as exemplified by some teachers reporting that they did not know what other teachers in the building were actually doing in the teaching of reading.

IV. Comments by School Staff

"The Staff would question some of the assumptions of this draft description. Test scores reflect that students are generally above

the district average in reading, yet the draft description implies that there is a lack of adequate reading instruction within our building.

The majority of the staff believes that the strength of our reading program is continuity and open lines of communication. We held a summer workshop in August, 1974, and developed a comprehensive reading program under the direction of , reading specialist. The decision was made to have co-basals, Houghton Mifflin and Ginn 360, utilize the District Scope and Sequence and the Region Reading Tracking Cards.

, an average sized school, appeared to parallel the district average values for most of the variables, except in the second grade, where classloads exceeded district averages (27+). This is the only grade that scored below the district mean and then, by only three points.

Comparing the last two years of test data showed that at all three grade levels tested, the group average scores for had shown a marked increase of from 13 to 18 percentage points for '76-'77. The staff attributes this growth to a school priority of total staff commitment towards emphasis on reading instruction. Even though for '76-'77 the data showed school had fewer students per teacher than the district average, the classload was heavier in primary levels and lighter at intermediate levels.

The Title I staff involved in the building did not work in the classroom's regular reading program and is not part of the building's staff allotment. A very well planned Title I Reading Program supplemented, but did not substitute for each teacher's normal reading program.

The Staff hopes our input concerning the nature of our reading program will be considered carefully in analyzing this draft. We are confident that our program is stronger than is implied."